



AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

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LIBRARY SERVICE TO LABOR NEWSLETTER *

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Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups
Detroit Public Library, Detroit 2, Mich.

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LIBRARY DEPOSITS IN PLANTS AND UNION HALLS

One method used in library service to labor groups is depositing books in plants and union halls. We have asked several librarians who have had experience in this field to tell us about it.

Further comments or discussion from librarians as well as union representatives are invited.

Dorothy Bendix

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

As a part of its service to trade unions, the Boston Public Library, at present, sends out eleven deposits of books to five plants --two large bakeries, one rayon plant, the Division of Employment Security, and a steel factory--to three headquarters--the Building Service Employees International Union, the Plumbers and Gas-fitters Union, and the Retail Store Employees Union--and to three union meetings--the Central Labor Union, the Industrial Union Council, and the Boston Teachers' Union. The duration of a deposit is from two to three months and occasionally a shorter period if a union so wishes.

On the whole, we consider the book deposits successful because the accessibility of books has resulted in much reading which would not have been undertaken otherwise. In many instances, the accessibility of books has meant that individuals prepared a more informed presentation of facts when they represented the union to management or to the public.

*The material published in the NEWSLETTER and the opinions expressed do not necessarily represent the policy or views of the ALA Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups.

LIBRARY OF THE
AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

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Frequently, interest is stimulated in a special subject that is demonstrated by individual requests for a particular title, author or topic. The deposit is also a constant reminder that the Library is ever ready to serve, so that we receive telephone calls for reference and research questions we might not otherwise receive. Although the circulation records are not accurate, being wholly dependent upon the personal traits of the volunteer union librarians, the records show enough circulation to indicate sufficient use of the books to make the project worthwhile.

The Boston Public Library began its service to trade unions in 1942 with Mr. Abraham Kalish in charge. When he left the Library Service I took over this work.

One of the main factors for success in deposit work is the book selection. There is a high correlation between an active circulation and current titles and best-sellers. Another prerequisite for success is the volunteer union librarian's enthusiasm for reading. Success is greatly increased when a Library staff member accompanies the deposit and serves the borrower directly. This is the service we give to the semi-monthly meetings of the Central Labor Union and to the monthly meetings of the Industrial Union Council and the Boston Teachers Union. At these meetings, I charge and discharge the books, recommend books, and take requests. At the CLU meeting and at the Industrial Union Council meeting I remain for the whole evening. At the Teachers' meeting, I remain until after the intermission for voting when the president announces "time out for Library books!" This personal and direct service is not only successful, but gratifying to the librarian. By getting to know the borrower's individual reading ability and his reading interests, the librarian can give him the most satisfactory service.

The selection of the books for the deposits is made by the Library. Although the union librarians are requested to offer suggestions and occasionally do so, the bulk of the selection is my responsibility. Surprisingly, we find that unions differ from one another, varying from one union which expresses a wish for no labor books to another union which desires only books on labor. Of those unions requesting a general collection, just as with any reading public, the level of reading corresponds to the educational and economic background of the borrowers. At present, the Library has discontinued the practice of purchasing books for the special collection for trade unions.

Although the primary aim of the Boston Public Library is to aid in the workers' education program, we do provide recreational reading to those unions which request it.

Helen F. Hirson, Assistant
Office of Division of Home
Reading and Community Services
Boston Public Library

MILWAUKEE PUBLIC LIBRARY

One method of giving library service to labor groups is by depositing books in the union office, at union halls, or in plants. In Milwaukee we have found the deposits in plants the most satisfactory.

The deposits in union offices have not been successful because many union members never go to the union office. Their dues are collected either through a check-off system or by the stewards in the plants. We tried a deposit in one union office with the selection particularly around steward's problems. Even though the

stewards did go to the office regularly for meetings, we found that only a few took the opportunity to use the books and the deposit was withdrawn.

In another office we found that the loss was very heavy and so we discontinued the service. The loss was covered by the union.

We found the deposits in plants more successful, although that is dependent greatly on who services the collection. This person is usually someone appointed to do so by the management. If she is enthusiastic, the circulation is good while, on the other hand, if she is apathetic and considers it just one more job, the use soon languishes.

If the union can be prevailed upon to have one of their members give the service, a great deal more can be done, both in workers' education and general reading. We have not been successful in having this done. It means that the individual either must sacrifice a lunch period or stay after working hours.

The books are selected at the central library, giving consideration to the type of reader to whom we are appealing. The people who are in charge are consulted and any book may be requested for a special loan.

The type of book depends largely on the plant serviced. In most cases, the books are primarily recreational, but some books of special interest to workers are included, as well as books with general informational value.

We have had these plant deposits in Milwaukee for more than twenty-five years. In one large plant where the personnel department had refused to permit the library to establish this service, the union made the request directly to top management. This has been one of our most successful deposits.

The ideal method is to have the collection serviced by someone from the library. Even though it is open for only a few hours once a week, the type of reading is greatly improved and the number of books read increases considerably. We had an opportunity to test this in Milwaukee when, for a while, we gave personal service to a deposit that had had self-service. However, this kind of service is very expensive and will not be possible in most libraries.

Ruth Shapiro, Chief
Department of Group Services
Milwaukee Public Library

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

The New York Public Library Service to Trade Unions is now running some thirteen library deposits. Nine of these are in trade union headquarters; three are run by hotels for their employees and one is run by a club of office employees.

The success of these collections in terms of circulation varies a great deal from one library to another and from one year to another. If the interest in the library flags and cannot be revived the collection is removed. A new unit is opened at another organization. In the course of the past four years, we have closed about seven of these collections, but we have opened twelve new ones. We limit the number to about thirteen, since this is as many as we can handle adequately with our present staff.

Of the thirteen libraries now in operation, two have been running for four years, three for three years, five for two years and three for less than one year.

One of the most successful libraries is that at the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, A.F.L., Local 3. For the first eighteen months, the response here was very discouraging, largely because so few members come to union headquarters where the books are housed. Then the stewards in eight shops agreed to act as librarians, taking collections of from eighteen to twenty books into their shops. They see that the books are circulated and returned to headquarters when they are no longer wanted. A fresh collection is then taken out. In the eighteen months since this system was instituted, circulation has almost trebled.

Another successful library is the one run by the employee's club. While this is not a union library it furnishes some valuable information on the "hows" of a successful procedure. Incidentally, the union in this place is very inactive. The success is due not only to the fact that the library is located in the building where the 300 workers are employed and is in an attractive centrally located room reserved for library use, but also to a very enthusiastic group of volunteer librarians who are always on the job.

In fact, we feel that it is safe to say that the success of a library depends at least ninety percent upon the person who runs it. If he or she is interested in the idea, enthusiastic about books or at least concerned and conscientious, the library will succeed. Without this, no amount of effort on the part of the public librarian can make the thing more than a routine matter.

Next in importance for the success of the project is the adaptation of the books to the tastes of the readers. This is a difficult thing to accomplish because in this type of work the librarian seldom has direct contact with users of the library. We have found three ways of reducing this difficulty. We invite union representatives to come to the library to look over the new books and the collection of older titles available, so that he can make his own selections. Further, we encourage requests for special titles and for books on special subjects from individual readers or from the union librarian. These requests may be for new titles not yet in the system or for older titles that must be borrowed from other parts of the public library. Although the business of filling these requests is often time consuming, we feel that this phase of the work plays an important part in developing and maintaining reader interest. In 1951, some 240 requests were filled for older titles that had to be borrowed from other parts of the system. No record is kept of special requests of books that we were able to fill directly from the pool of books now developed for our special service. Despite the fact that this pool has come to include a wide variety of books, there was nevertheless an increased demand for items which were available only in other sections of the library. Of the 240 requests referred to above, 30% were for fiction, mostly older titles, and 16% for books in the field of the social sciences.

The make-up of these collections varies greatly from one union to another. The larger part of each consists of recreational material. But where unions have an active educational program there is more demand for educational materials, especially in the field of labor problems.

Where intensive educational courses are being conducted, and where the union does not have one of the general collections a different type of arrangement is made. Small collections of 20 or 30 books dealing specifically with the subject under consideration are loaned for the duration of the course. For these, books are selected by the librarian in consultation, if possible, with the teacher. The success of these

small collections depends largely on the value the teacher attaches to reading among trade union members and upon his ability to interest his students in the literature available to them.

Of course, we feel that even the lightest type of reading can be an educational experience for a person who has not established reading habits. It is with this in mind that the collections are made as varied as possible and are tailored so far as possible to the tastes and interests of the individual union members.

Dorothy Kuhn Oko
in charge of
Library Service to Trade Unions
New York Public Library

NEWARK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Newark's use of deposit collections as part of its Service to Trade Unions has been confined to deposits in union halls. Our use of these deposits has not been extensive, and so far it has not been encouraging. Some of the possible reasons for this will be discussed later.

All but one of the deposits were placed after contacts had been established through attendance of the librarian at an educational class or union meeting. In some cases a close personal relationship had been established with the president of the local or its business agent. In all cases the placing of the deposit was accompanied by a visit to a membership meeting to explain the use of the deposit, etc., and to publicize the library generally. In all but one case the books were chosen by the librarian and the local official in joint consultation. The exception was the deposit loaned to a local of the Iron Workers for use during a series of classes being conducted by the state university. In this case the contact came from the university, and the librarian chose the books without consultation. The other unions concerned were locals of the Association of Communication Equipment Workers of TWOC-CIO, the Building Service Employees International Union, AFL, the New Jersey Traffic Division of CWA-Ind., the United Retail and Wholesale Employees -CIO, and the Textile Workers Union of America-CIO. All deposits were placed in the local union halls, except in the case of TWUA, in which case the collection was located in a regional office.

The actual books and pamphlets chosen varied not only in terms of the type of union receiving them, but also in terms of the ratio of "labor" to "non-labor" material. The size of the deposits ranged from 25 books and 9 pamphlets to 59 books and 10 pamphlets, and they remained with the locals from 6 months to a year. The only exception was the deposit loaned to the Iron Workers, which was used over a period of 4 months only, which was the duration of the classes. Except for this collection, which was geared to the subject of the classes, all deposits included fiction and biography as well as non-fiction dealing with labor and social problems. In some cases the original collection remained for the full time the deposit was loaned; in some others the books were changed periodically.

The most successful deposit, which had the advantage of being supervised by an interested union official, also was changed most frequently and included more fiction, including some mysteries. However, one of the least successful ones also included more fiction, as well as more non-labor material, especially chosen in line with the occupational and other interests of the members. In addition to lacking effective supervision, however, this deposit also suffered from the fact that the membership of the local was largely made up of people with little education and a poor

reading background. On the other hand, the most successful deposit, in addition to these other factors, was placed with a white collar local with a fairly high educational level and a better than average reading background.

While it is difficult to reach any definite conclusions from an analysis of this sort, there are some tentative conclusions and suggestions for changes in procedure in the handling of future deposits which can be drawn. In the first place there is a real question whether deposits in union halls reach enough people, since probably a majority of the membership rarely if ever goes there. Our experience also seems to indicate that a great deal depends on the interest of the union officials involved, in terms of really working at the promotion of the project. It may also be significant that in no instance was a rank and file unionist put in charge of the collection or involved in any of the planning. The reason for at least the first half of this statement was probably the very fact that the deposits were located in union halls, where supervision by someone always in attendance would naturally be easier and more efficient. This is probably another factor favoring deposits in plants.

As far as the nature of the collection is concerned, there is probably little doubt that the general, largely non-labor collections meet with more success, even when the membership is fairly well educated and socially conscious. It is interesting to note that in the case of the deposit established for use by a class, the circulation was as poor as the worst of the deposits where there was no direct stimulation to use the material. It is possible of course that some use was made of the material in the classes, which would not show in the circulation figures. Our experience also seems to indicate that a fairly frequent changing of the collection to weed out books which are not in demand is much to be desired.

These are some of the conclusions we draw from Newark's limited experience. It will be interesting to see if any of the reports of the experiences of other libraries bear them out.

Betty Day
Service to Trade Unions
Newark Public Library

REPORT ON
ANNUAL WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY WORKERS' EDUCATION CONFERENCE
FEBRUARY 23-24, 1952

"How To Make International Affairs Come Alive" was the theme of this year's Conference, sponsored annually by American Labor Education Service in New York City.

The remarks of Harold Taylor, President of Sarah Lawrence College and the opening speaker, were a good introduction to the Conference. Each point he made was to come up frequently during the week-end's discussion. He emphasized the need for interpreting foreign affairs to union members and pointed out that this is no longer one of the educational jobs we would like to do, but an absolutely necessary one. He pointed out that while films, pamphlets, etc. have their use, we cannot get very far with these tools unless we succeed in motivating the worker to want to study foreign

relations. One of the ways of arousing this interest is, he said, to deal with international affairs in terms of how they affect the worker personally. But probably the most successful way is to bring the union members into personal contact with people from other countries. This can be done by using visiting foreign trade-unionists and by sending more of our own union people abroad.

There were three discussion meetings Saturday afternoon which dealt with these and other questions relating to the theme of the Conference. I attended the third group, which concerned itself with the use of materials on international relations. Irvine Kerrison, Director of the Labor Program of the Institute of Management and Labor Relations, Rutgers University, was chairman. Members of the panel were Otto Pragan, Research and Educational Director of the International Chemical Workers' Union, Robert Repas of the American Friends Service Committee, and Brendan Sexton, Director of Education of the UAW-CIO. Each of the panel members described some actual programs in international affairs, after which there was a general discussion period.

Some of the points brought out by the panel and the discussion were:

- 1) We must realize first that union members are no more interested in foreign affairs than the average American.
- 2) Ways of motivating workers to an interest in the field include the use of films, the use of current events of special interest (such as the MacArthur affair and the Korean conflict) as an opening wedge for broader discussion, and making the most of foreign trade unionists visiting America.
- 3) There is a real need to interpret the foreign labor movements to American workers, especially in so far as they are socialist orientated.
- 4) Among the programs described was the fund-raising campaign the UAW is undertaking to raise funds for its work in the international field. In addition to raising money, it is hoped that some interest in foreign affairs will be aroused. The AUTO WORKER is also devoting a section of each issue to some problem in this field.
- 5) Pamphlets are useful to some extent, but many are not readable and how much effect they have on the reader is still open to question.

At the dinner meeting Leon Keyserling, Chairman of the President's Council of Economic Advisors, spoke on "America's Stake in a Free World". He spoke in very optimistic terms of America's economic position and of the general world situation. He likened our present aid to foreign countries to the domestic economic program undertaken during the depression, the difference being that the benefits to America will not be so immediate nor so obvious.

Sunday morning there were two more discussion groups. The one I attended dealt with how labor education can strengthen its international program through co-operation with other organizations. On the panel were representatives of the U.S. Department of Labor, the ILO, ALES, ICFTU and the AFL Free Trade Union Committee. The work of the ILO was suggested as one type of international activity that could be "brought home" to the unionist very well, since the wider adoption of ILO minimum standards would mean less competition from cheap foreign goods produced by low-paid workers. This competition, which is causing severe set-backs in some American industries, was mentioned as one of the things which can make it difficult to interpret our

foreign aid program effectively. The question of the use of printed material coming from these agencies was discussed, and it was pointed out that in many cases much of it is not readable or of little appeal. Favorable mention was made of the fact that the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO is planning to start gearing its material to particular geographical areas. The use of space in local union papers by these agencies was urged, since these are probably more widely read than the daily newspaper.

The speaker at the closing session was Philip M. Kaiser, Assistant Secretary of Labor for International Affairs. He was also concerned with the present state of the world and he also took a bright view of things. He feels that there are a number of hopeful signs. In America there is a greater recognition of our responsibility in the field of international affairs. In Europe, for the first time, there is economic cooperation, the possibility of a European army, etc. There is the expanding trade union exchange program and the growth of an international free trade movement. However, he warned that there is real fear in the world that we are trying to Americanize the other nations, and he called for a greater recognition of the cultural values of the countries we are trying to help.

This year, as in the past, much of the value of the Conference was the opportunity it provided to meet and talk with many of the people in the workers' education field, including other librarians doing work with trade unions. Mrs. Dorothy Oko of the New York Public Library, Mrs. Helen Hirson of the Boston Public Library and Miss Ruth Shapiro of Milwaukee are some of the librarians I had a chance to compare notes with.

Betty Day
Service to Trade Unions
Newark Public Library

PLANS FOR ALA CONFERENCE IN NEW YORK CITY, June 29-July 4, 1952

The Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups will sponsor two meetings at the New York Conference:

- 1) On Monday, June 30, at 10:30 AM

"Workers Education and Libraries"

Speakers: Lawrence Rogin, Director
Education and Publicity Department
Textile Workers Union of America, CIO

Mark Starr, Educational Director
International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, AFL

- 2) On Thursday, July 3, at 10:30 AM

Panel Discussion on Library Service to Labor Groups

Participants: Librarians who have had experience in
this field